

Dr. Elizabeth R. Osborn
Asst. to the Chief Justice for Court History and Public Education

“Mendez v. Westminster: Para Todos Los Niños”
School Segregation in the post-*Brown* Era?

In celebration of Law Day 2007, the Indiana Supreme Court Legal History Series and the Indiana Commission for Continuing Legal Education will host a free CLE featuring Sandra Robbie--the Emmy Award-winning writer/producer of *“Mendez v. Westminster: Para Todos Los Niños (For All the Children).”* This special CLE program will be held on Wednesday May 2, 2007 from 3:00 to 4:15 p.m. (EDT) in the Supreme Court Courtroom in the Indiana State House in downtown Indianapolis.

Sixty years ago this year and seven years before the better-known case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, 370 U.S. 483 (1954), was decided, the Mendez family moved to Orange County, California, where their children were denied access to their local all-white public schools. Gonzalo and Felicitas Mendez had moved to Orange County to rent a farm from a Japanese family who had been relocated to a Japanese internment camp. This arrangement allowed the Japanese family to hold on to their land and Gonzalo Mendez to realize his dream of finally being the boss on a ranch.

The Mendez family fought the discriminatory policy of the local school authorities. They won at the trial court but the Westminster School Board appealed. The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit affirmed the Mendez family victory in April 1947. Shortly thereafter, then Governor Earl Warren ordered the end of segregation in California's schools. Seven years later, as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, Warren authored the opinion in *Brown v. Board of Education* that declared all separate

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schools inherently unequal, and in *Brown II*, he ordered America's public schools to desegregate "with all deliberate speed" *Brown v. Board of Education (Brown II)*, 349 U.S. 294, 301 (1955).

Sandra Robbie is a Latina resident of the same community where the Mendez children lived and went to school. Ms. Robbie has worked tirelessly to bring this story to the public's attention. As an intern at a local PBS affiliate, Robbie researched, wrote, and produced this documentary. "*Mendez v. Westminster*" received an Emmy Award in 2002. In further recognition of this case's importance, the U. S. Postal Service is issuing a stamp in its honor this year.

The Indiana Supreme Court Legal History Series and the Indiana Commission for Continuing Legal Education will host both this free CLE session in the Supreme Court courtroom and a free program for school children that same morning. Both events will feature excerpts from the documentary, remarks by Ms. Robbie about her work in creating the film, and an audience discussion about the continuing efforts to provide equal educational opportunities to all school children. Indianapolis area attorney Marisol Sanchez, a co-founder and member of the ISBA Latino Affairs Committee and an associate at Bose McKinney & Evans, will facilitate the afternoon CLE session.

For more information about this program, please visit the "Courts in the Classroom" website at www.IN.gov/judiciary/citc. To reserve a seat for the May 2, 2007 CLE "*Mendez v. Westminster: Para Todos Los Niños*," please contact Dr. Elizabeth R.

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Osborn, Assistant to the Chief Justice for Court History and Public Education. She can be reached at 317.232.2550 or eosborn@courts.state.in.us. Teachers and other educators may reserve space in the morning program through Dr. Osborn as well. This program will also be webcast. Links will be available on May 2, 2007 from the judiciary's webpage, www.IN.gov/judiciary. Viewers of the webcast will not be eligible for CLE credit. Further information about the documentary can be found on channel KOCE's website at www.koce.org.

This CLE program has been approved for 1.3 hours of CLE credit (Course #0099541). It is the second of three free sessions planned by the Indiana Supreme Court for 2007. The first, a program on eugenics took place in April, and the final event will be held on Thursday November 15, 2007, as a part of the annual Spirit and Place Festival featuring noted legal historian Dr. Paul Finkleman. Professor Finkleman will discuss Indiana's pre-Civil War role in the national debate over slavery and laws regarding the return of fugitive slaves. Particular attention will be given to the Decatur County, Indiana case *Luther A. Donnell v. State of Indiana*, 3 Ind. 480 (1852).

Additional information about this program, and other events and materials developed by the Supreme Court Legal History Series and the "Courts in the Classroom" project, can be found at www.IN.gov/judiciary/citc.